Interview summary: The Honourable Mélanie Joly

Background

The Honourable Mélanie Joly is the Minister of Foreign Affairs. She has held this position since October 2021.

Minister Joly was interviewed by Shantona Chaudhury, Yves Côté and Dahlia Shuhaibar on September 6, 2022. Questions relating to this summary should be directed to Ms. Chaudhury. Text in [square brackets] are explanatory notes provided by Commission counsel to assist the reader.

Five senior officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (known as Global Affairs Canada or "GAC") were interviewed on August 23, 2022: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marta Morgan; Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cindy Termorshuizen; Consul General of Canada in Detroit, Joseph Comartin; Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of Canada in Washington, Martin Loken; and former Executive Director of the United States Relations Division, Sébastien Beaulieu. A summary of that interview has been prepared and should be read in conjunction with this summary.

Involvement in the January and February 2022 events

Minister Joly began the interview by noting three relevant aspects of her role. First, the Canada–United States relationship is Canada's most important diplomatic relationships and involves a variety of stakeholders. Canada's relations with the United States are decentralized. As Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister Joly plays an important role in managing relations with the United States, although she is not the only minister to do so. Other ministers (including the Minister of International Trade, Mary Ng; the Minister of Transport, Omar Alghabra; and the Minister of Finance, Chrystia Freeland) are in frequent contact with their American counterparts. In addition, the Prime Minister is in contact with the President of the United States. Minister Joly communicates with her counterpart, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, primarily regarding the geopolitical situations in which both countries are involved.

Second, Minister Joly noted that with respect to its relations with Canada, the U.S. administration operates essentially in the same way. As such, if Minister Joly raised an international trade issue during a call with Secretary Blinken, he would take note of it and inform her that he would share the message with the team responsible for the issue within the U.S. administration.

Third, Minister Joly stressed that in January and February 2022, most of her time was spent on the crisis in Ukraine. At the time, Minister Joly had primary responsibility for the management of the Ukraine file. She worked with the Minister of National Defence, Anita Anand, and with other ministers to develop sanctions and coordinate Canada's

position and actions with its international partners. Minister Joly noted that Secretary Blinken was also primarily occupied by the crisis in Ukraine during that period (as were other European counterparts). As a result, Minister Joly's role in relation to the matters before the Commission was extremely limited. Indeed, she was on a ministerial trip in Europe during a significant portion of the period of interest to the Commission.

The Minister was asked if her staff had contacted Canada's Ambassador to the U.S., Kirsten Hillman, Mr. Loken, or Mr. Comartin during the protests. She stated that she did not know whether these communications had taken place.

Minister Joly had a discussion with U.S. Ambassador to Canada, David Cohen, on February 11. That conversation related to Ukraine, not the Convoy. The Minister also spoke with Secretary Blinken on February 16. That call focused primarily on Ukraine, although Minister Joly did express her concern about the Convoy and mentioned the fact that the Prime Minister and the President had spoken. Minister Joly stated that she did not participate in the call between the Prime Minister and the President and that she had no other information in that regard, other than the content of the public statement.

Minister Joly indicated that she heard a few informal comments from foreign counterparts about the ongoing protests in Canada during the Munich Security Conference that took place on February 17. She also briefly spoke with New Zealand's Minister of Foreign of Affairs about the protests that were also ongoing in that country. In general, the comments she heard demonstrated a genuine concern about the threat posed against democratic institutions by protests like the Convoy. The Minister also mentioned protests similar to the Convoy taking place in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and France.

Minister Joly was asked to comment on an *Agence France Presse* article dated February 19 indicating that she had expressed concerns about foreign interference with respect to the Convoy and that this was one of the reasons for which the government had invoked the *Emergencies Act.*[1] Minister Joly stated that her concern at the time was mainly related to non-Canadian sources funding the Convoy rather than interference by foreign states. She added that the Minister of Finance was also extremely concerned about foreign sources funding the Convoy.

Minister Joly was informed through Cabinet meetings that her colleagues were in contact with their U.S. counterparts. However, she did not speak to them directly about these conversations.

---

[1] *Agence France Presse*, "Canada Hit Out At 'Foreign Interference' Over Anti-Vax Truckers' Protests", February 19, 2022, online: ndtv.com/world-news/canada-hit-out-at-foreign-interference-over-anti-vax-truckers-protests-2776819.

[During the Convoy period, Minister Joly attended only the Incident Response Group meeting on February 21.[2]] The Minister noted that she had attended this meeting because another topic of interest to her was being discussed.

[During their interview, members of the GAC panel described the activities of the Office of Protocol of Canada, which is responsible for the security of diplomatic missions in Canada, in January and February 2022. The Office received several complaints from diplomatic missions located in Ottawa's downtown core.] The Minister was asked about this issue. She stated that, at the time, the complaints from diplomatic missions had not been brought to her attention. She noted that the department generally handles these types of complaints without her intervention. In addition, she stated that she received no information regarding the protests that had taken place near some of Canada's diplomatic missions in the U.S.

The Minister also explained that one of GAC's roles is to provide information to other government departments on foreign countries and international events. The department collects this information daily and disseminates it within government. Accordingly, her fellow ministers, including the Minister of Transport, have access to GAC information when holding discussions with their U.S. government counterparts.

[In its *Explanation pursuant to subsection 58(1) of the Emergencies Act,* which it tabled in Parliament, the Government of Canada stated that the Convoy protests in Ottawa had jeopardized

> Canada's ability to fulfil its obligations under the *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* as a host of the diplomatic community. They also posed risks to foreign embassies, their staff, and their access to their diplomatic premises.[3]]

When asked about this, Minister Joly stated that she had read the Explanation but, at the time, as mentioned earlier, she was not aware of the concerns expressed by the diplomatic missions.

---

[2] SSM.NSC.CAN.0000406_REL.0001.

[3] *Explanation pursuant to subsection 58(1) of the Emergencies Act*, p. 14.